

# STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



**Workshop of Sandro BOTTICELLI (Florence c.1445 - Florence 1510)**

**Saint Peter Asleep [recto]; Study for a Figure of Saint Luke [verso]**

Pen and brown ink and brown wash, over traces of an underdrawing in black chalk, heightened with white, on paper washed a reddish-pink.

The verso in pen and brown ink and brown wash.

197 x 149 mm. (7 3/4 x 5 7/8 in.)

This beautiful drawing, formerly attributed to Sandro Botticelli but today regarded as the work of an unknown but gifted member of his workshop, was first published in 1938 by Bernard Berenson with a speculative attribution to the Florentine painter Raffaello Carli, known as Raffaellino del Garbo (c.1466-c.1528). Acquired by the Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation in Houston in 1976, this drawing of *Saint Peter Asleep* was included in the magisterial exhibition of *Botticelli Drawings* recently presented at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. As Furio Rinaldi wrote of this drawing in the exhibition catalogue, '*This double-sided sheet is proof of Sandro Botticelli's graphic inventions and the role his workshop played in disseminating them. The drawing on the recto – a compact, elderly figure resting his head on his arm – is evidently based on the artist's studies of the sleeping Saint Joseph in the Uffizi... and a later version in a private collection.*' As Rinaldi has observed, the prototype for this type of sleeping figure appears in a drawing by Botticelli of *The Adoration of the Christ Child* of c.1480, executed in pen and brown ink and wash, in the Uffizi in Florence. Even closer to the present sheet is an autograph drawing of a *Seated Saint Joseph, Resting on His Right Hand* sold at auction in 2014 and now in a private collection in New York, which is a preparatory study for the same figure in Botticelli's tondo painting of *The Nativity with the Holy Family and Saint John the Baptist* of c.1490-1495 in the Faringdon Collection Trust at Buscot Park in Oxfordshire. (The drawing is, in fact, the only autograph drawing by Botticelli to have appeared on the art market since the 19th century.) It has been suggested that Botticelli's drawing of *Saint Joseph* would have been kept in his studio as a sort of model to be reused and adapted by his assistants, as happened with the present sheet.

Describing the present sheet, Rinaldi has pointed out that '*Here, the workshop artist reprised Botticelli's originals in the figure's formal rendering and his exquisite drawing technique, which calibrates neat contours in ink, fine white heightening on and around the figure, and strokes of brown wash on the background, lightly tinted reddish-pink. The artist, while endowed with a degree of personal style, is nonetheless unable to fully realize Botticelli's synthesis of fluid execution and clarity of form.*' The use of red-tinted paper seen here is typical of Tuscan draughtsmanship of the late 14th and 15th centuries, when it was used mainly for figure studies. Botticelli adopted the practice in several of his drawings, as did artists such as Antonio Pollaiuolo, Domenico Ghirlandaio, Raffaellino del Garbo, Filippino Lippi and the young Michelangelo.

The present sheet can be related to a closely corresponding figure of a sleeping Saint Peter in a small devotional painting of *The Agony in the Garden* of c.1500, painted by Botticelli or possibly his workshop, in the Museo de la Capilla Real in Granada, Spain. This was the only work by Botticelli known to have left Italy in the artist's lifetime, as it belonged to Queen Isabella of Castile and was presented by her in 1504 to the Capilla Real, the funeral chapel of the Cathedral of Granada. As Rinaldi notes of the present sheet, '*While closely matching the figure in the finished painting [in Granada], slight differences seem to confirm the drawing's creative status, further established by a quickly drawn sketch of a similar crouched figure on the verso (identified as a Saint Luke by the bull)...While it is unknown if the painting's commission came to Botticelli directly from the Spanish royal family or if it found its way to Granada autonomously, this drawing attests to how the artist increasingly relied on his assistants for the design and painting processes of his works, even for high-end devotional commissions.*' It may be noted in passing that as recently as 1976, the scholar Konrad Oberhuber is stated to have believed the present sheet to be an autograph work by Botticelli.

Botticelli had a large and active workshop, although apart from Filippino Lippi (c.1457-1504), the illegitimate son of his own teacher Fra Filippo Lippi, his pupils and assistants were relatively minor artistic figures. As has been noted, however, '*their drawings nonetheless played an important role in the workshop, regulating the production and dissemination of the master's "brand", his maniera.*

*These workshop drawings also highlight Botticelli's great reliance on his assistants, who were involved in both the design and execution phases of his works...Such creative contributions must lead today's art historians to challenge the traditional canons of modern connoisseurship in terms of authorship, attribution, and the supposedly firm rules of workshop practices, in which the master provides the graphic ideas and the workshop executes them.'*

The unidentified collector's mark with a rampant lion and the letters CP, stamped at the lower right corner of the sheet, is recorded by Frits Lugt as only appearing on one drawing known to him, by an artist in the circle of Rembrandt, and nothing at all is known of the collector. It may be noted, however, that the same collector's mark is also found on a small self-portrait drawing in black chalk, attributed by several scholars to Titian, which is today in a private collection.

## Exhibitions

San Francisco, California Palace of the Legion of Honor, *Botticelli Drawings*, 2023-2024, no.47.

## Literature:

Bernard Berenson, *The Drawings of the Florentine Painters*, Chicago, 1938, Vol.II, p.59, no.570C (as School of Botticelli, possibly by Raffaellino del Garbo); Ronald Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli*, London,

1978, Vol.II, p.99, under no.B88; Terisio Pignatti, *Five Centuries of Italian Painting 1300-1800 From the Collection of The Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation*, Houston, 1985, p.40, illustrated p.42 (as School of Botticelli); Furio Rinaldi, ed., *Botticelli Drawings*, exhibition catalogue, San Francisco, 2023-2024, p.210, under nos.45-46, pp.214-215, no.47 and p.264, no.47 (as Workshop of Botticelli, and dated 1501-1504).

### **Artist description:**

Alessandro di Mariano Filipepi was the son of a leather worker, and eventually took his brother's nickname 'Botticelli', meaning chubby, as a family name. He was trained in the studios of Fra Filippo Lippi, Andrea del Verrochio and Antonio del Pollaiuolo, and his first documented painting is a Fortitude painted in 1470 for the merchant's guild of Florence. Among his patrons was Lorenzo (Il Magnifico) de' Medici and members of many significant Florentine families, for whom he painted both secular and religious pictures, as well as portraits. Between 1481 and 1482 Botticelli was one of a number of Florentine and Umbrian painters engaged on the fresco decoration of the side walls of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican, where he painted three large scenes and a number of papal portraits. His reputation enhanced by his work in Rome, Botticelli returned to Florence and throughout the 1480s received numerous important commissions for altarpieces, devotional easel pictures and oval tondi, as well as portraits and mythological subject pictures, notably the large paintings *La Primavera*, *The Birth of Venus* and *Pallas and the Centaur*. Apart from his time in Rome and a brief period working in the Camposanto in Pisa in 1474, Botticelli was to remain in Florence for his entire career. His last documented work, an altarpiece of *The Pentecost* for a church in the town of Montelupo, was completed in 1505.

Despite Giorgio Vasari's statement, in his biography of Botticelli, that 'Sandro's drawings were extraordinarily good, and so many, that for some time after his death all the craftsmen strove to obtain some of them', only a very few drawings by the master are known today. Apart from a series of ninety-two largely unfinished silverpoint drawings on parchment intended to illustrate a manuscript of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, executed in the 1490s and now divided between the Kupferstichkabinett in Berlin and the Vatican Library, less than thirty autograph drawings by Botticelli survive today.